

Red Sox rookie Xander Bogaerts takes pressure in stride

Jorge L. Ortiz, USA TODAY Sports 11:16 p.m. EDT October 22, 2013



(Photo: Greg M. Cooper, USA TODAY Sports)

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

BOSTON — Xander Bogaerts figures that a year ago at this time he might have been at a beach in Aruba, as idyllic a setting as one can imagine — but not nearly as desirable to him as where he is now.

The Boston Red Sox rookie infielder has gone from promising prospect to getting an August call-up to contributing to the club reaching the World Series, where he'll start at third base in Game 1 on Wednesday.

Bogaerts, 21, describes the experience as a whirlwind, but it has hardly left his head spinning. In fact, that ability to keep his wits about him in high-pressure situations stands out as much as his eye-catching talent and athleticism.

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In Game 6 of the American League Championship Series, Bogaerts coaxed a seventh-inning walk from Detroit Tigers co-ace Max Scherzer on a close 3-2 pitch, helping to set up Shane Victorino's decisive grand slam that clinched the series.

The payoff pitch from Scherzer was a wicked changeup — the first Bogaerts had seen all game — and he had the presence of mind to let it go while benefiting from the type of borderline call that few rookies get.

"I saw a video and the catcher leaned over, so I think that's why he didn't get it," Bogaerts said in English, one of four languages he speaks. "I was sitting on a fastball all the way, and I recognized it wasn't a fastball. I saw it low, but it actually wasn't that bad. It's just that the catcher was inside."

In the previous game, making the first postseason start of his career, Bogaerts doubled in Boston's three-run second inning against Tigers starter Anibal Sanchez, who had thrown six no-hit innings in Game 1. The Red Sox went on to win 4-3 to take a 3-2 lead in the series.

With regular third baseman Will Middlebrooks slumping, manager John Farrell has turned to Bogaerts — a life-long shortstop — as his replacement. The results could not be much better, though the sample size is small.

The native of Aruba has gone 3-for-6 with five walks and a .727 on-base percentage in the postseason, scoring seven runs in six games. In a town that appreciates the drawn-out at-bat, Bogaerts is being hailed as the latest, youngest practitioner of the Red Sox's strategy of wearing down pitchers.

"It was impressive the way he was able to control his emotions and stay with his approach," Red Sox hitting coach Greg Colbrunn said. "He put together some great at-bats."

That shouldn't come as a complete surprise. Bogaerts was named USA TODAY Sports' Minor League Player of the Year this season after batting .297 with a .388 on-base percentage and 15 home runs in 116 games between Class AA Portland (Maine) and Class AAA Pawtucket (R.I.), where he was the youngest player in the International League.

He earned a spot on the Red Sox's postseason roster and became the youngest player in franchise history to appear in a playoff game. Bogaerts turned 21 on Oct. 1. Babe Ruth, at 21 years, 246 days, was the previous standard-bearer.

Yet Red Sox veteran Jonny Gomes said he doesn't treat Bogaerts like a 21-year-old.

"We don't have the time to teach anyone anything. It's go time. It's win time," Gomes said. "The way he stepped in and carried himself says a lot."

WORLD SERIES: [Lost superstars don't slow Red Sox, Cards](#)

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Even before the season began, Bogaerts got a taste of high-level, feverish baseball when he played in the World Baseball Classic for the Netherlands, which made it out of the Asian bracket to reach the tournament semifinals. He said the experience helped prepare him for October baseball.

"Japan was huge. All the fans rooted for them," Bogaerts said. "It's just like if we go to St. Louis and all the fans are rooting for them. The only difference is it was indoors. Same intensity. Everybody wants to win."

Signed as a 16-year-old along with twin brother Jair, Bogaerts moved quickly up the Red Sox chain. At 6-3 and 185 pounds, he projects as a power-hitting shortstop in the mold of Hanley Ramirez, his favorite player.

Like all Red Sox prospects, Bogaerts was indoctrinated with the credo of working the count. For him, however, the concept sunk in at an early age, and it has provided him an opportunity he could only dream about when lying on the beach back home.

"As a young player, you want to hit so bad, you just want to swing," Bogaerts said. "But as you get experience and get to the higher levels, you have to adjust and know that the pitchers are getting better, so you have to get better also."

Source : <http://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/mlb/redsox/2013/10/22/boston-red-sox-xander-bogaerts-world-series/3167495/>